

POETRY WORKSHOP FOR CHILDREN AND BEGINNERS

Based on work for TULLY POETRY WEEK 2007

On the THEME: RIPPLE

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Opening comments about Poetry

Poetry is telling about something in our life.

Poets look closely at life around them.

Poets try to tell about life they see, or hear, or feel, or move through.

Poets also tell something new about what they experience.

Poets also try to imagine what the future might be like, from what they observe. They might imagine a future that has gone bad for us because of our actions of today. They might imagine a future that is fabulous because of the better actions we can do.

Poets try to tell these things in the fewest words they can, rather than writing a story about them. But this is not a rule and some very famous poets (e.g. Ezra Pound) have written a poem as long as a book.

Poets ask questions about everything they experience in life. They think about those things, and look at them from all different angles. This is why poets can be very important to society. Many other people learn a great many things from hearing about it through poetry.

Workshop Plan

Today I am going to show you one way of writing a poem, even when you don't think you have anything to think about or write about. You can even do this in a group of 3 children. Do either as individuals, in small groups or as one big group.

1. Sensorials. Each student in the group writes down one thing you remember doing or seeing or smelling or hearing or feeling or tasting or even thinking, since you got up this morning. If doing it as an individual, try to remember five sensory experiences.
2. Free Associations. Now write down what comes to mind when you hear a word. We will start with the theme of the poetry week – RIPPLE. What word comes to mind from the first response. Write it down. And then what comes to mind from that response. Repeat this process until you have five words.
3. Now write each of these words on a piece of paper against the previous list of sensorials.
4. Now, looking at these pairs of words, write next to them an action or a sound that comes to mind.
5. So here are your key poem words.
6. Now, to form your poem around these words, you need to look at everything you have written down, for some sort of meaning, a pattern of meaning. You don't have to use everything. Maybe some words stand out. What do they tell about each other? Then, when you are done developing images, turn the ideas back onto yourself. Make some phrases about what you are thinking. Speak them aloud. How do they sound? You have to talk poetry but also write everything down. You can cut it out and move it around as you try to make it sound right on the next reading. 10 minutes.

MY EXAMPLE: How I was thinking as I wrote a poem

My experience this morning – I put on the kettle;

A ripple word: ripple THINK wave THINK pebble

Pebble is an interesting image. It began as the image of throwing a pebble into water causing ripples. But then I began to imagine that I was skimming the pebble across the water instead. Skimming is a rapid movement across water. It has a sound like ‘tough, tough tough’; To make skimming there also needs to be the action of throwing.

But if everything comes back to refer to me, then perhaps I am the pebble. And then if I am throwing the pebble then I am throwing myself. How? Where to? Maybe I can think of going to my car to come down to Tully, like I am throwing myself out of the door and down to Tully to the poetry workshop.

My first draft was really clunky but it got the ideas down in a basic poetic form from which I could work the words around. For example, eventually I used the word ‘shot’ instead of ‘throw’. The shorter word fits into the rhythm / metre better, and the sound of the word ‘shot’ is like something going fast and hard, and that is an image the listener will get that, that is different from just saying throw, which is a drawn out word, a bit slower, and softer.

After a while I had:

“I picked myself out of bed,
like a pebble from the shore
put on the kettle
poured my coffee
drank it down
and shot the pebble
out the door
skimming tough, tough, tough,
to Tully”

And because it still sounds a bit clunky about drinking the coffee, I’ll change something in the middle. I realised that I don’t even need to say I put the kettle on, because I can leave that up to the reader or listener’s imagination when they hear that I am drinking coffee. Well that is just my choice. There is no right answer for this. If you think the listener has certain experiences as well and they will fill in the gaps with their own imagination. So now I have:

“I pick myself out of bed,
like a pebble from the shore,
put on the coffee
drank it down
and shot the pebble
out the door,
skimming tough, tough, tough
to Tully.”

But it still seems that this poem doesn't say anything much, just a description of going to Tully. But is that interesting enough for a poem. Well, because I had a reason to go to Tully, to run a poetry workshop, maybe I can conclude with that in the poem. But that doesn't sound interesting. So I chose to return to the meaning of the theme Ripple, to see if I can make a connection with this event of me going to Tully to run a poetry workshop. It occurred to me that ripple has another meaning about a small splash (event) making a lot of waves (events, growth, development). See how making word connections and associations continue to work.

So I could imagine me as a pebble falling from up on the Tableland where I live, into the sparkling water that is Tully. And there is a splash (of poetry work) and a lot of ripples (new poetry work from new poets). And I can see your lives as poets spreading out in ripples from Tully into the world, into the future.

So now I have:

“I picked myself out of my bed
like a pebble from the shore,
put on the coffee,
drank it down,
and shot the pebble
out the door.
Skimming touh, touh, touh,
splashing into Tully,
throwing poets
to the world.

Hey, did you see, I got throwing back. The kettle is still lost.

But what about a title: mmmmmmmmm (thinking) – what are two or three words that just say everything that the poem is trying to say: Pebbles, for sure. And the poem really is all about me as a poet and everyone I will work with today are poets. And I am the pebble in the poem, so all poets are pebbles.

That's my title: **Poets are Pebbles.**